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PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLM #0250/01 0471158  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 161158Z FEB 06  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2582  
INFO RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 8928  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 5811  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 3847  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9264  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000250

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PHUM KIRF](#) [PGOV CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: POLICE, COMMUNITY, SUPPORTIVE OF  
HARASSED PASTOR

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On February 7, emboffs traveled to Alawwa, 30 miles north of Colombo in Kurunegala District, to look into reports from the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) that the congregation of a local Christian church had been threatened and harassed on Christmas day. Discussions with both the Church's pastor and local police officials indicated that the police and the local community were responsive to the pastor's concerns and supportive of his work. This case proved to be an example of a community striving to maintain unity and tolerance among divergent faiths. End summary.

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CHURCH-GOERS INTIMIDATED ON CHRISTMAS DAY  
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¶2. (SBU) The National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka (NCEASL) published a notice on December 29 stating that parishioners of the King's Revival Church in Alawwa, 30 miles north of Colombo in Kurunegala District, were attacked on their way to services on December 25. Poloff and pol FSN traveled to Alawwa on February 7 to meet with the Church's pastor and his wife. The pastor said that on Christmas day, a mob of thirty people accosted parishioners on their way to church. After the attackers injured four people, he called the police. Over the phone, the police reassured the pastor they would protect the Church premises and the parishioners, and said he should continue with services as scheduled. According to the pastor, police arrived on the scene immediately thereafter, and the mob dispersed. The police took injured persons to the hospital, one of whom remained there for three days.

¶3. (SBU) According to the pastor's wife, a local thug who enjoys the patronage of a provincial council member led the attacks. The pastor said the sme group had also been violent during the Novembr 2005 presidential election, but the police hadbeen unable to build a case because they faced political pressure not to pursue an investigation. Following the December 25 intimidation, the pastor and his wife identified some of the attackers to the police, and the perpetrators were subsequently held in police custody for one day. On March 2, five people will stand trial for their role in the December 25 attack. However, according to the pastor, the police asked one key suspect to come to the station for questioning on January 11, but he failed to appear. That same day, someone dumped oil in the pastor's drinking well. On January 16, assailants threw stones at the pastor's home, breaking a window.

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PASTOR HARASSED BY FEW, BUT FINDS  
SUPPORT FROM LOCAL COMMUNITY  
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¶4. (SBU) The pastor said that soon after his well was contaminated, the group that carried out the December 25 attack invited local Buddhist monks to a meeting to complain about the pastor's activities. The pastor did not attend the meeting, but he later talked to the monks, who encouraged him in his work and reported they had publicly defended him and told the group they were wrong to be intolerant. The pastor added that the prime suspect failed to show up at the police station for a second scheduled interview, but on January 26, the suspect and the pastor met at the police station, where a new officer accused the pastor of instigating trouble. Nevertheless, the pastor said, the rest of the police, the local monks, and the local government agent had all been supportive of the pastor. The pastor noted that from January 26 onward, he had faced no further harassment.

¶5. (SBU) Poloff also met with police officers in Alawwa who produced police logs detailing each incident the pastor reported. The police officers said since there were no eye witnesses, it was difficult to catch the perpetrators who poured oil in the pastor's well and those who threw stones at his window. Nevertheless, the police said, they were conducting a thorough investigation and had intelligence officers working on this case, which is being handled separately from the December 25 incident. One officer also noted that he had spoken to the local villagers, urging them to practice religious tolerance. The officers felt their intervention had been useful since the pastor faced no further harassment.

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COMMENT  
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¶6. (SBU) While the initial attacks on the pastor and his congregation are obviously disturbing, the Alawwa story offers a heartening contrast in a country where many such cases have been met with apathy from local law enforcement and open antipathy from Buddhist clerics. In addition, the pastor's willingness to engage with local Buddhist monks shows that despite his experience, he feels comfortable in his community at large, offering some hope of greater religious understanding, at least within Alawwa. End comment.  
LUNSTEAD